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ABSTRACT

Communication depends both on content (the information conveyed in a message) and on relationship. If either aspect is missing, communication deteriorates. This principle has been tested in industrial settings and is also valid for the classroom. Two processes for implementing these principles are management by objectives and Likert's Systems Four management principles, including supportive relationships, group decision making, and high performance goals. (TJ)

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THE IMPORTANCE OF WATZLAWICK'S CONTENT AND RELATIONSHIP ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION IN THE CLASSROOM

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As I have stated elsewhere (Tubbs and Moss, 1974b) each of us probably has had only a very few truly outstanding teachers. Those that were outstanding probably rated fairly high on the following descriptors:

helpful	organized
sensitive	interested
flexible	enthusiastic
open-minded	objective
interesting	friendly
stimulating	prepared
respectful	insightful
significant	realistically demanding
provocative	clear
impartial	knowledgeable

The problem is, how do we as college teachers behave in such a way as to deserve these labels (assuming they are relevant to the evaluation process)? Also, what are the major factors or dimensions under which these descriptors cluster? This paper is an attempt to answer the above questions.

Content and Relationship Aspects of Communication

Watzlawick, et al (1967) provided a profound insight when they identified two aspects of communication. Content refers to the information conveyed in any message, while relationship refers to the information about the information. They state ". . .all such relationship statements are about one or several of the following assertions: 'This is how I see myself. . .this is how I see you. . .this is how I see you seeing me. . .' and so forth in theoretically infinite regress." (p. 54)

In the teaching context an analogy may be drawn between the task-oriented behavior of the instructor as the content, and his warmth, empathy, fairness, etc., as contributing to the relationship aspect of communication. Tiedman (1942) emphasized the importance of the student teacher relationship when stated that "Teachers that are aloof, unfriendly, and otherwise irritate and

antagonize their pupils destroy interest and incentives for learning and promote resentment, unwholesomeness (sic) attitudes, and personality disorders." Gibb (1960) supports this notion by indicating that a classroom climate which is free of fear maximizes learning. Fausti and Moore (1966) have also argued for the importance of the interpersonal relations between students and teachers in the educational process.

At the same time, however, it seems reasonable to assume that an education cannot be built on rapport alone. The primary criterion of the success of an education is the amount of cognitive growth a student undergoes. There is a disturbing trend for graduating high school seniors to score lower on standardized college entrance exams. This may be due to fewer bright students taking the tests (or for that matter going to college); to the inability of the tests to validly measure the students' actual cognitive growth; or perhaps to the actual decline in student learning. While I strongly support the trend toward student evaluations of college teachers, I also believe that this may bring additional pressure to bear on the professor to become more popular (i.e., receive higher evaluations) by awarding higher grades for poorer performance.

The key to effective teaching/learning seems to be in achieving some sort of optimum balance of emphasis on both the content and the relationship aspects of communication in the classroom.

Comparison to Other Contexts

The management field has also gone through a similar problem in attempting to provide an effective form of leadership behavior to promote optimum performance of subordinates. Taylor (1911) attempted to more carefully control output by closely scrutinizing each and every move an employee made. The

current attempt at teacher accountability seems to be a throwback to this worn-out management philosophy. Then the pendulum swung to the opposite extreme with the human relations movement which grew out of the classic Hawthorne studies (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939). After several years of this approach which over-estimated the importance of the relationship aspect to actual performance, a new realization occurred. The works of McGregor (1960), Blake and Mouton (1964), Herzberg (1966) and Likert (1967) have shown that a combination of both content and relationship (or task and people) approaches provides a greater effectiveness than does either extreme approach. Similarly, in the classroom context, Munn and Giffin (1973) found that college teachers who were high on both task and people orientation were rated higher on evaluations by students than those teachers who were either high on task or people alone. Unfortunately this study showed no differential effect on actual student cognitive growth.

How to Implement

Teachers in the field of speech communication have greater than average responsibility to exhibit effective communication skills. The alternative is to be the laughingstock of the students. Try to imagine a mathematics teacher who cannot work the problems he assigns to his students. Given the charge to practice what we teach, it seems reasonable to conclude that we must be more sensitive to the relationship aspects of communication than professors of other disciplines. I find it impossible to discuss participative problem-solving and to stress the importance of consensus in my small groups classes, and then to turn around and dictate answers to problems which arise in the course of the semester. If we do nothing else, we should at least serve as role models for our students to observe. My professors at Bowling Green

University were able to practice as well as preach and that excited me enough about the speech field that I left my undergraduate biology major to embrace this discipline. As a biology major my professors rarely bothered to learn my name, course after course, semester after semester. After switching to speech, I can say that the aloof type of professor is the exception rather than the rule in departments of speech communication.

But relationships alone are not enough. Our field needs also to continue to build a viable and relevant body of content. The question remains, how might we achieve this balance of emphasis?

1. Manage by objectives.

The current emphasis upon behavioral objectives in education is desirable. I believe that we can do a better job of reaching our targets if we first establish and identify them. Several excellent sources are available to help professors write behavioral objectives. One major criticism is that those objectives easiest to identify might be of lesser significance (e.g., be able to maintain eye contact for 10 seconds with at least four people in your audience while giving a one-minute speech). While those more important qualities like developing empathy, supportiveness, and sensitivity are harder to develop behavioral objectives for. While this argument has some validity, I believe that the use of some objectives is better than using no objectives at all. The interested reader can consult (Kibler, Barker and Miles, 1970) for additional information on the use of behavioral objectives.

2. Employ Systems Four management principles.

Likert (1967) has identified three operating principles of a style of management which stresses both the content (task) and the relationship (people) aspects of leadership. First, is to employ the principle of supportive

relationships. This is defined in the eyes of the subordinate as one which promotes a positive self-image. The first step in this direction is to make every attempt to learn and remember students' names. Then all the lessons of good interpersonal communication apply in attempting to promote this supportive psychological climate (c.f. Tubbs and Moss, 1974a, especially Chapter 12).

Second, is the use of group decision-making methods. Active student participation in solving problems related to assignments, grading procedures, scheduling of assignments, and planning additional educational experiences (e.g., field trips, guest lectures, etc.) are usually worth the risk and the extra time involved. I must admit that this may backfire, but it works more often than it fails.

Third, have high performance goals. If I expect mediocrity I usually am not disappointed. On the other hand, when I expect high performance from myself as well as my students, I usually get something that approximates high quality performance. There is no greater thrill than having even high espectations exceeded by an inspired student performance. One problem that this creates, however, is that students may be surprised that the professor can be both a "nice guy" and a "hard nose" at the same time. Yet it can be done. Also, there is mounting evidence in numerous industrial studies that the systems four style of management is superior to either the scientific management approach of Taylor, or the human relations approach of Roethlisberger and Dickson (c.f. Hain, 1972; Likert, 1973; Tubbs, 1973; Hain and Tubbs, 1974).

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to explain the classroom application of

Watzlawick's content and relationship aspects of communication. I have argued that both are important, and that neither should be emphasized to the exclusion of the other. I have shown that these principles have been tested in industrial settings and have proven their worth. Finally, I have offered two recommendations for implementing the ideas proposed. Namely, managing by objectives and employing the systems four management principles of (1) supportive relationships, (2) group decision making, and (3) high performance goals. My hunch is that by using these teaching techniques we too can attain the ranks of those few teachers whom our students remember as having been truly outstanding.

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